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A N

ESSAY

CONTENTS
ON

RIDICULE.

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L O N D O N :

Printed for R. DODSLEY at *Tully's Head* in *Pall-Mall*;

And Sold by M. COOPER in *Pater-noster-Row*. 1743.

[Price One Shilling.]

Y A S S E CONTENTS.

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AN
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TWAS said of Old, deny it now who can,
The only Laughing Animal is Man.
The Bear may leap, its lumpish Cubs in view,
Or sportive Cat her circling Tail pursue;
The Grin deep-lengthen Pug's half-human Face, As
Or prick'd-up Ear confess the simp'ring Ass;
In awkward Gestures awkward Mirth be shown,
Yet, spite of Gesture, Man still laughs alone.

O Friend, O—, whose indulgent Smile
Approves my Subject, and shall smooth my Toil :ro
You, who ne'er censure, but at Reason's Call;
And laugh with Candour, if you laugh at all.
Hear from this Source what various Ills proceed,
This Air-drawn Dagger, by which thousands bleed ;

Hear

Hear what weak Heads, and frailer Hearts deride, 15

Hear what you cannot feel, th' Effects of Pride.

Th' all-powerful Hand, that taught yon Sun to shine,
First dress'd in Smiles the human Face divine;

And early Innocence, unspoil'd by Art,

Thro' the glad Eye betray'd th' o'erflowing Heart. 20

No hoarded Bliss the Soul at Home confin'd,

Self-center'd Views, the Famine of the Mind.

No Coxcomb Cares from weak Disgusts began,

A Brother's Frailties but proclaim'd him Man.

Nought perfect here they found, nor ought requir'd, 25

Excus'd the Weakness, and the Worth admir'd.

Proud, and more proud, succeeding Ages grew;

They mark'd our Foibles, and would mend them too.

This, strangely wise, saw what was just and best, 30

And by his Model wou'd reform the rest.

The rest, impatient, or reject with Scorn

The specious Insult, or with Pride return;

Fierce as himself, assume the Appian Frown,

'Till not one secret Failing sleeps unknown;

But all meet all with controversial Eyes, 35

If wrong refute them, and if right despise.

Not with their Lives, but pointed Wits, contend,

Too weak to vanquish, and too vain to mend.

While

While thus precarious waves the doubtful Field,
 Where none can conquer, and where none will yield;
 Keen Envy height'ning what weak Pride begun, 41
 The Sneer grows gen'ral, and Mankind's undone.

Our mirthful Age, to all Extremes a Prey,
 Ev'n courts the Lash, and laughs her Pains away.
 Declining Worth imperial Wit supplies, 45
 And *Momus* triumphs, while *Africa* flies.

His Power despotic, as his Empire wide;
 The Test of all Things, and by all apply'd.
 No Truth so sacred, Banter cannot hit,
 No Fool so stupid, but he aims at Wit.

[Deed,
 Ev'n those, whose Breasts ne'er plann'd one virtuous
 Nor rais'd a Thought beyond the Earth they tread;
 Ev'n those can censure, those can dare deride

A BACON'S AV'rice, or a TULLY'S Pride;
 And sneer at human Checks by Nature given, 55
 To curb Perfection e're it rival Heaven.

Nay, chiefly such in these low Arts prevail,
 Whose own No-Talents leave them Time to rail.
 Born for no End, they worse than useless grow,

(As Waters poison if they cease to flow) 60
 And Pests become, whom kinder Fate design'd

But harmless Expletives of Human kind.

Thrice happy we ! how virtuous are we grown !
 We hate all other Failings but our own.
 Lurk as they can, if we direct the Ray, 65
 The guilty Atoms in the Sun-beams play.
 No venial Slip our quick Attention escapes ;
 We trace each *Proteus* thro' his hundred Shapes ;
 To Mirth's Tribunal drag the Caitif Train,
 Where Mercy sleeps, and Nature pleads in vain. 70
 What Traits of Wit our Sects alternate feel !
 And Darts strike deepest, wing'd with flaming Zeal.
 See ! slighted Reason sinks beneath her Toils,
 And gay Religion only arm'd with Smiles !
 — Whoe'er ye are, O stop this civil Storm, 75
 With Candour pity, or with Sense reform.
 To you alone, if Heav'n's blest Beam's display'd,
 The little *Gosben* of a World in Shade,
 'Tis Reason's Task, with Eloquence divine,
 To spread its Influence wide, and give it strength to shine.
 Ye mutual Bonds, whose Chain, that ends above,
 Joins Man to Man, and links the World in Love,
 Why slack ye now ? 'Tis Mirth dissolves the Tie,
 Friend, Brother, Parent in one Ruin lie ;
 Each Laughing murders what he holds most dear, 85
 And for the senseless Grave reserves the Tear.

And whence this Lust to Laugh? what fond Pretence?
 Why, *Shaft/b'ry* tells us, Mirth's the Test of Sense;
 Th'enchanted Touch, which Fraud and Falshood fear,
 Like *Una's* Mirror, or *Itburriel's* Spear. 90

Not so fair *Truth*-----aloft her Temple stands
 The Work and Glory of Immortal Hands.
 Huge Rocks of Adamant its Base enfold,
 Steel bends the Arch, the Columns swell in Gold.
 No Storms, no Tumults reach the sacred Fane, 95
 Waves idly beat, and Winds grow loud in vain.
 The Shaft sinks pointless, e'er it verges there,
 And the dull Hiss but dies away in Air.

Yet let me say, howe'er secure it rise,
 Sly Fraud may reach it, and close Craft surprize! 100
 Truth, drawn like Truth, must blaze divinely bright;
 But, drawn like Error, Truth may cheat the Sight.
 Some aukward Epithet, with Skill apply'd,
 Some specious Hints, that half their Meanings hide,
 Can Right and Wrong most courteously confound,
Banditti like, to stun us e'er they wound. 105
 Hence, mighty *Mandeville*, thy Fame arose,
 With Wit to strike, and Cunning to impose;

Ver. 107. *Mandeville*, Author of the *Fable of the Bees*, &c.

Thy

Thy veriest Falshoods so absurdly just, 109
 That, where we most condemn thee, laugh we must.
 Hence Party-Pamphlets all their Strength assume,
 Eternal there these Flow'rs of Rhet'ric bloom.
 Read but both Sides, and all Mankind are Knaves,
 All Patriots Rebels, and all Courtiers Slaves.
 Th' unlicens'd Press a *Grubstreet's* hideous Roar, 115
 And *British* Liberty a wedded Whore.
 The Parish Priest, whose healing-Care's confin'd
 To raise the Feeble, and direct the Blind;
 Disclose to grosser Minds the gradual Way;
 Explore their Paths, and lead himself the Way; 120
 First point the GOD thro' all his varying Pow'rs,
 His laughing Harvests, and enlivening Show'rs;
 Thence lead th' intrusted Soul to know its Home,
 A dying SAVIOUR, and a Life to come. 124
 This Province mild, which *Chaucer's* wanton Muse,
 Nay, hostile *Dryden's* ev'n with Rev'rence views,
 For human Slips, or those who vilely dare
 Profane that Order they presume to wear:
 See sneer'd, traduc'd, an oft-repeated Tale
 Of plund'ring Dues, and orthodoxal Ale; 130

Ver. 115. Th' unlicens'd Press, Preface to *John Bull*.

116. *British* Liberty, Mrs. *Bull's* Defence of Cuckoldom.

125, and 126. *Chaucer*, *Dryden*. See *Chaucer's* Parson's Character, imitated and enlarged by *Dryden* in his Fables.

Those fatal Roots, whence Pride and Priestcraft grew
And much bad Wit expos'd to prove it true.

See wretched Mirth to low Buffoon'ry fly,
Before God's Ark when *David* capers high;
And peevish *Jonas*, in the Spleen, declares
He'll damn the Race eternal Justice spares.

Yet sure you'll own, gay Pests of Britain's Isle,
Ye lawless Thinkers, that for ever smile,
If Wit's weak Malice hold th' illusive Glass,
And first distort, before it shows the Face;
Your learn'd *Hilario* may be rashly thought
To quote from Authors what they never wrote;
And *Shaftsb'ry*'s self, unaw'd by Faith, to feel
Enthusiastic Flights of visionary Zeal.

Is there an Art, thro' Science's various Store,
But madly strain'd becomes an Art no more?
Is there a Virtue, Falshood can't disguise?
Betwixt two Vices every Virtue lies:
To this, to that, the doubtful Beam inclinè,
Or Mirth's false Balance take, the Triumph's thine.

Let mighty *Newton* with an Augur's Hand,
Thro' Heaven's high Concave stretch th' imperial Wand,

Ver. 134. and 135. *David* and *Jonas*. These two Characters are thus ridiculously represented by *Shaftsbury* in his *Characteristicks*.

The vagrant Comet's dubious Path assign,
 And lead from Star to Star th' unerring Line;
 Who but with Transport lifts his piercing Eye,
 Fond to be lost in vast Immensity;
 But shou'd your Taylor, with as much of Thought,
 Erect his Quadrant, ere he cuts your Coat,
 The Parchment Slips with Algebra b'erspread,
 And Calculations scrawl on every Shread;
 Art misapply'd must stare you in the Face,
 Nor could you, grave, the long Deductions trace.
 Fond of one Art, most Men the rest forego;
 And all's ridiculous, but what they know.
 Freely they censure Lands they ne'er explore,
 With Tales they learnt from Coasters on the Shore.
 As *Afric's* petty Kings, perhaps, that hear
 Of distant States from some weak Traveller;
 Imperfect Hints with eager Ears devour,
 And sneer at *Europe's* Fate, and *Britain's* Power.
 All Arts are useful, as all Nature good,
 Correctly known, and temp'rately pursued.
 The active Soul, that heav'n-born Lamp, requires
 Still new Supports to feed, and raise its Fires;
 And Science' ample Stores expanded stand,
 As diff'rent Aids the varying Flames demand.

And, as the Sylvan Chace bids Bodies glow,
 And purple Health thro' vigorous Channels flow:
 So fares the Infant Mind, by Nature drawn,
 By Genius hous'd at Reason's early Dawn;
 That dares fair Learning's arduous Seats invade,
 Climb the tall Cliff, or pierce th' entangled Shade,
 New Health, new Strength, new Force its Powers receive,
 And 'tis from Toil th' immortal learns to live:
 Or, if too harsh each boist'rous Labour proves,
 The Muse conducts us to more happy Groves,
 Where sport her Sister Arts, with Myrtles crown'd,
 Expressive Picture, and persuasive Sound;
 Where Truth's rough Rules the gentlest Lays impart,
 And Virtue steals harmonious on the Heart:
 We oft, 'tis true, mistake the Sat'rist's Aim,
 Not Arts themselves, but their Abuse they blame:
 Yet, if, Crusaders like, their Zeal be Rage,
 They hurt the Cause in which their Arms engag'd
 On heav'nly Anvils forge the temper'd Steel,
 Which Fools can brandish, and the Wise may feel:
 Readers are few, who nice Distinctions form,
 Supinely Cool, or credulously Warm.
 'Tis Jest, 'tis Earnest, as the Words convey
 Some glimmering Sense to lead weak Heads astray.

And when, too anxious for some Art affail'd,
 You point the latent Flaw by which it fail'd;
 Each to his Bias leans, a steady Fool,
 And, for the Part defective, damns the Whole.

In elder *James's* ever-peaceful Reign,
 Who sway'd alike the Scepter and the Pen,
 Had some rough Poet, with Satyric Rage,
 Alarm'd the Court, and lash'd the Pedant Age;
 What Freights of Genius on that Rock had split!
 Where now were Learning, and where now were Wit?
 Matur'd and full the rising Forest grows,
 E're its wise Owner lops th'advancing Boughs;
 For Oaks, like Arts, a length of Years demand,
 And shade the Shepherd, e're they grace the Land.

Where then may Censure fall? 'Tis hard to say;
 On all that's wrong it may not, and it may.
 In Life, as Arts, it asks our nicest Care,
 But hurts us more, as more immediate there.
 Say, shall we, vent'rous, with a Trav'ler's Haste,
 Fix future Landmarks o'er this trackless Waste?
 What to avoid, at least, succinctly show,
 Stop where we doubt, be cautious where we know,
 And, wisely temp'rate, as the Precepts rise,
 Persuade, not dictate, and but hint Advice?

Resign we freely to th'unthinking Crowd, 225
 Their standing Jest, that swells the Laugh so loud,
 The Mountain Back, or Head advanc'd too high,
 A Leg mis-shapen, or distorted Eye;
 We pity Faults by Nature's Hand impress'd,
Thersites' Mind; but not his Form's the Jest, 230
 Here then we fix, and lash without Controul
 These mental Pests, and *Hydra's* of the Soul;
 Acquir'd Ill-nature, ever prompt Debate,
 A Zeal for Slander, and delib'rate Hate:
 These court Contempt, proclaim the public Foe, 235
 And each, * *Ulysses* like, should aim the Blow.

Yet sure, ev'n here, our Motives shou'd be known;
 Rail we to check his Spleen, or ease our own?
 Does injur'd Virtue ev'ry Shaft supply,
 Arm the keen Tongue, and flush th'erect'd Eye? 240
 Or do we from Ourselves Ourselves disguise;
 And act, perhaps, the Villain we despise?
 Hope we to mend him? Hopes, alas, how vain!
 He feels the Lash, not listens to the Rein.

Intent on Vengeance wou'd we right Mankind? 245
 The Purpose glorious, but the Power confin'd;
 And if to quell, not pierce, the Sword we draw,
 The hardy Felon quite contemns the Law.

D

Besides,

Besides, such Crimes transcend our keenest Smile;
 'Tis Indignation swells th' exalted Stile, 250
 Learns the bold Verse with *Roman* Rage to glow,
 The Stab of *Oldham*, or thy Scourge, *Despreau*!
 Vices when ridicul'd, Experience says,
 First lose that Horror which they ought to raise,
 Grow by degrees approv'd, and almost aim at Praise.
 When *Tully's* Tongue the *Roman Clodius* draws,
 How laughing Satire weakens *Milo's* Cause!
 Each pictur'd Vice so impudently bad,
 The Crimes turn Frolics, and the Villain mad;
 Rapes, Murders, Incests, Treasons Mirth create, 260
 And *Rome* scarce hates the Author of her Fate.
 'Tis true, the Comic Muse, confin'd to Rules,
 Supply'd the Laws, and sham'd the tardy Schools;
 With living Precepts urg'd the Moral Truth,
 And by Example form'd the yielding Youth. 265
 The titled Knave with honest Freedom shown,
 His Person mimick'd, nor his Name unknown,
 Taught the young Breast its opening Thoughts to raise
 From Dread of Infamy to Love of Praise,
 From thence to Virtue; there Perfection ends, 270
 As gradual from the Root the Flower ascends;
 Strain'd thro' the varying Stems the Juices flow,
 Bloom o'er the top, and leave their Dregs below.

'Twas thus a while th' instructive Stage survey'd
 From Breast to Breast its glowing Influence spread. 275
 Till, from his nobler Task by Passions won,
 The Man unravel'd what the Bard had done;
 And he, whose Warmth had fir'd a Nation's Heart,
 Debas'd to private Piques the gen'rous Art.
 Here sunk the Muse, and, useless by degrees, 280
 She ceas'd to profit, as she ceas'd to please.
 No longer Wit a judging Audience charm'd,
 Who rous'd not fir'd, not raptur'd, but alarm'd;
 To well-tun'd Scandal lent a jealous Ear,
 And thro' the faint Applause betray'd the Fear. 285
 We, like *Menander*, more discreetly dare,
 And well-bred Satire wears a milder Air.
 Still Vice we brand, or titled Fools disgrace,
 But dress in Fable's Guise the borrow'd Face.
 Or as the Bee, thro' Nature's wild Retreats, 290
 Drinks the moist Fragrance from th' unconscious Sweets,
 To injure none, we lightly range the Ball;
 And glean from diff'rent Knaves the copious Gall;
 Extract, compound, with all a Chymist's Skill,
 And claim the motley Characters who will. 295
 Happy the Muse, cou'd thus her tuneful Aid
 To Sense, to Virtue, wake the more than Dead!

But few to Fiction lend attentive Ears,
 They view the Face, but soon forget 'tis theirs.
 " 'Twas not from them the Bard their Likeness stole,
 " The random Pencil haply hit the Mole; 301
 " Ev'n from their prying Foes such Specks retreat;
 --They'll hide them from themselves, and crown the
 Or should, perhaps, some softer Clay admit, [Cheat.
 The fly Impressions of instructive Wit; 305
 To Virtue's Side in conscious Silence steal,
 And glow with Goodness, e'er we find they feel;
 Yet more, 'tis fear'd, will closer Methods take,
 And keep with Caution what they can't forsake;
 For Fear of Man, in his most mirthful Mood, 310
 May make us Hypocrites, but seldom good.
 And what avails that Seas confess their Bounds,
 If subtler Insects sap the *Belgian* Mounds?
 That no wing'd Mischief cleave the Mid-day Skies,
 If thro' the Dark the baleful Venom flies? 315
 Or these, more dire, their public Rage abate,
 To stab in secret the unguarded State?
 Besides, in Men have varying Passions made
 Such nice Confusions, blending Light with Shade,
 That eager Zeal to laugh the Vice away 320
 May hurt some Virtue's intermingling Ray.

Men's Faults, like *Martin's* broider'd Coat, demand
 The nicest Touches of the steadiest Hand.
 Some yeild with ease, while some their Posts maintain,
 And Parts defective will at last remain. 325
 There, where they best succeed, your Labours bend,
 Nor render useleſs, what you ſtrive to mend.

The youthful *Curio* blush'd whene'er he ſpoke,
 His ill-tim'd Modeſty the general Joke;
 Sneer'd by his Friends, nor cou'd that Sneer endure---
 Behold, ſad Inſtance of their Skill to cure!
 The conſcious Blood, that fir'd his Cheek before,
 Now leaves his Boſom cool, and warns no more.

But Affectation ---there, we all confeſs,
 Strong are the Motives, and the Dangerleſs. 335
 No Nature's there, to melt our Manhood down,
 No *Gorgon* Vice, to ſtare us into Stone.
 Sure we may ſmile where Fools themſelves have made,
 As balk'd Spectators of a Farce ill play'd;
 And laugh, if Satire's Breath ſhou'd rudely raiſe 340
 The painted Plumes which Vanity diſplays.

O fruitful Source of everlaſting Mirth!
 For Fools, like Apes, are Mimies from their Birth.
 By Faſhion govern'd, Nature each neglects,
 And barterſ Graces for admir'd Defects. 345

Some aim at Ignorance with matchless Skill,
 And learn, in spite of Sense, to reason ill.
 Some Vice affect, poor Folly's last Excess,
 As *Picts* mistook Deformity for Dress,
 And smear'd with so much Art their hideous Charms,
 That the grim Beauty scar'd you from her Arms.
 The artful Hypocrites, who Virtue wear,
 Confess, at least, the sacred Form is fair;
 And Apes of Science equally allow
 The Scholar's Title to the laurel'd Brow; 355
 But what have you 'gainst Satire's Lash to plead,
 Who 'midst Conviction's pow'rful Blaze proceed?
 What but that worst of Pangs you dare not own,
 Who laugh abroad, but tremble when alone.

Yet oft these Follies bask in Virtue's Shine, 360
 The wild Luxuriance of a Soil too fine.
 But oh, repress them, wheresoe'er they rise----
 And how perform it?-----There the Danger lies.
 Short are the Lessons taught in Nature's School,
 Here, each Peculiar asks a sep'rate Rule. 365
 Nice is the Task, be gen'ral if you can,
 Or strike with Caution if you point the Man:
 And think, O think, the Cause by all assign'd
 To raise our Laughter, makes it most unkind.

For tho' from Nature *these* no Strength receive, 370

We give them Nature when we bid them live.

Like *Jove's Minerva* springs the gentle Train,

The genuine Offspring of each teeming Brain;

On which, like tend'rest Sires, we fondly doat,

Plan future Fame in Luxury of Thought, 375

And scarce at last, o'erpower'd by Foes or Friends,

Torn from our Breasts the dear Delusion ends.

Then let Goodnature every Grace exert,

And, while it mends it, win th'unfolding Heart.

As in some Stream the Bank's projected Force 380

Not stops the Current, but directs its Course,

So let Goodnature o'er our Mirth preside,

Divert, not check; without impelling, guide.

Allur'd by this, the gath'ring Frown unbends,

The Laugh grows gen'ral, and ev'n Wits are Friends.

Touch'd with this trickling Balm, fair Virtue wakes,

And gen'rous Satire heals the Wound it makes.

Secur'd by this, ye *British* Bards, be bold,

Let copious Humour every Source unfold,

Inventive Wit its whole Artillery play, 390

Grave as *Cervantes*, or as *Lucian* gay.

In *Clio's* number'd Prose teach Mirth to chide,

Clio *Britannia's* Censor, and her Pride :

Let, like *Scarron's*, the strong Description glow,
 To sink at once more eminently low: 395
 With *Butler's* Drollery, *Garth's* Politeness vie,
 And *Rablais' Jests*, without his Ribaldry:
 Wear *Phillips' pompous*, *Gay's* ingenuous Stile,
Arbutnot's various, *Swift's* unweary'd Smile;
 Or His, who bids all *Greece* at once revive, 400
 Shares every Art that every Muse can give,
 And, nobly conscious whence that Influence came,
 To silence Envy, dares avow the Flame.
 Thus shall my Friend by stealing Steps discern
 That soft Humanity, he loves, return: 405
 See moral Mirth a Face of Triumph wear,
 Yet smile unconscious of th' extorted Tear.
 See Vice, attended by his captive Train,
 Confess its Justice, while he bites his Chain;
 Deep in her Folds her Sting pale Envy hide, 410
 And Worth, self-valuing, own an humbler Guide;
 Pride, without Rancour, feel th' objected Fault,
 And Folly blush, as willing to be taught;
 Critics grow mild, Life's witty Warfare cease,
 And true Goodnature breathe the Balm of Peace. 415

F I N I S.

